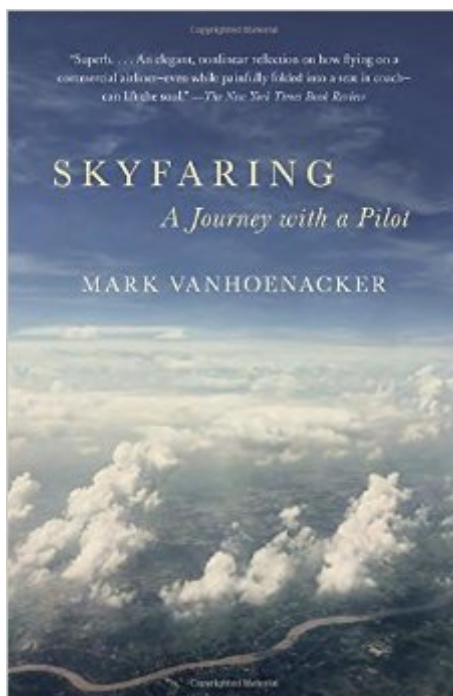


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Skyfaring: A Journey With A Pilot (Vintage Departures)



Synopsis

One of the Best Books of the Year The *New York Times* *San Francisco Chronicle* *The Economist* *Kirkus Reviews* In the twenty-first century, airplane flight once a remarkable feat of human ingenuity has been relegated to the realm of the mundane. In this mesmerizing reflection on flying, Mark Vanhoenacker, a 747 pilot who left academia and a career in the business world to pursue his childhood dream of flying, helps us to reimagine what we as pilots and as passengers are actually doing when we enter the world between departure and discovery. In a seamless fusion of history, politics, geography, meteorology, ecology, family, and physics, Vanhoenacker vaults across geographical and cultural boundaries; above mountains, oceans, and deserts; through snow, wind, and rain, renewing a simultaneously humbling and almost superhuman activity and reawakening our capacity to be amazed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A *New York Times* Notable Book A Best Book of the Year *San Francisco Chronicle* *The Economist* *GQ* *Kirkus Reviews* "Superb. . . . An elegant, nonlinear reflection on how flying on a commercial airliner even while painfully folded into a seat in coach can lift the soul." *The New York Times Book Review* "A beautifully observed collection of details, scenes, emotions and facts from the world above the world." *The Economist* "Remarkable. . . . [Skyfaring] lifts the thoughts

and spirits. . . James Fallows, *The Atlantic* "Marvelously literate. . . Vanhoenacker . . . can put one in mind of Henry James. . . A big-hearted book. . . The New York Times "Gorgeous and captivating. . . Skyfaring artfully demystifies the fascinating technical aspects of commercial flight while delivering poetic insights straight from the cockpit. . . San Francisco Chronicle "Masterly, beautifully written. . . The Times Literary Supplement "[Vanhoenacker is] an exceptionally lucid and philosophically minded writer. . . The Wall Street Journal "Not since Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic *Vol de Nuit* . . . has there been such a fantastic book about flying. . . Skyfaring takes the genre to a whole new level. . . Condé Nast Traveller "Imagine Henry David Thoreau reflecting on the wonders of the lights of Oman as seen from the cockpit of a 747, and you begin to have something of the fresh magic of this exceptional debut. . . Pico Iyer, author of *The Man Within My Head* "Riveting. . . Vanhoenacker paints humanity seen from the aviator's perch, woven together with a fascinating layman's account of the mechanics of flight. . . [He] invokes philosophers, music, history, and his own past and family to convey the sense of discovery and disorientation that he feels crisscrossing the globe. . . The Times (London) "A love letter to flight. . . Vanhoenacker slips easily between poetic meditation into the nature of travel and technical explanations of the mechanisms of the 747, and I found all of it fascinating. It is a delight to encounter someone so unabashedly enamored of the romance of his profession. . . Emily St. John Mandel, *The Millions* "[A] revelatory work of observation, thought, and expression. . . James Fallows, author of *China Airborne* "Flying, a century after Kitty Hawk, can seem both scary and banal, the realm of underwear bombers and miniature mouthwashes, but Vanhoenacker recovers its metaphysics. . . The New Yorker "Vanhoenacker's passionate and beautifully written book will remind even the most jaded traveller of the wonder of flight. . . The Sunday Times (UK) "A masterpiece of time, distance, palm trees, frosty mornings, lofty ambition and self-effacing charm. . . Monocle "A 747 pilot with a poetic streak. . . The writing makes flying feel as amazing as it really is. . . Wired.com "A description of what it's like to fly by a commercial pilot who is also a master prose stylist and a deeply sensitive human being. . . This couldn't be more highly recommended. . . Alain de Botton, author of *How Proust Can Change Your Life* "Vanhoenacker makes [flying] wondrous again. . . London Evening Standard

“[Skyfaring] never loses sight of how beautiful it is to soar above the clouds. . . . [Vanhoenacker’s] writing is fluid and elegant. • The New Statesman (UK) “An author of real distinction with a genuinely poetic sensibility as well as a memorable turn of phrase. • The Spectator “Vanhoenacker makes [flying] wondrous again. • London Evening Standard “A skilful meditation on the glories of traversing the earth at the helm of mankind’s greatest technological achievement. . . . You’ll quickly find yourself in thrall to Vanhoenacker’s marvellous prose. • GQ (UK) “Through prose as passionate and erudite as it is informative, [Vanhoenacker] describes not merely the mechanical workings of flight, but will rekindle, in those who care to listen, a lost appreciation for the marvel of global air travel. • Patrick Smith, author of Cockpit Confidential

Mark Vanhoenacker is a pilot and writer. A regular contributor to The New York Times and Slate, he has also written for Wired, the Financial Times, the Los Angeles Times, and The Independent. Born in Massachusetts, he trained as a historian and worked as a management consultant before starting his flight training in Britain in 2001. His airline career began in 2003. He now flies the Boeing 747 from London to major cities around the world.

Pleasant reading from a warm and friendly pilot. If you’re interested in what goes on in a cockpit of a 747 (and some other equipment) this book is a good start. It is not technical however the author is very good at explaining technical concepts such as air speed vs. ground speed or how air, moisture, temperature, etc. all affect flight. What makes this an interesting read is that the pilot shares his personal relationship with flying and traveling, going into his family history and past flights and trips, as well as reporting on his time in the cockpit. In fact, for the first two chapters I was thinking that this would be more an autobiography and travelogue than what I expected it to be. In the end, it is a nicely balanced book; you get to know the author and, like him (or at least I did) and you get to know more about what happens in the front of the plane as well as how the pilots spend their time on the ground. A good read, As a very frequent flier (many years of 100k-350k miles) I would have liked there to have been a bit more mechanics, but I was satisfied with what was there. I learned a bit more about what was happening as I slept at 40,000 feet. Capt. Vanhoenacker is obviously well educated, has a feel for the arts and expresses himself in a manner that is pleasant to read as well as educational.

If you enjoyed "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoevsky, you may enjoy Skyfaring. This is both a testament to the author's skill and the reason you may end up abandoning the book after the first couple of chapters. This book is not so much about aviation as about the author. Most of the prose is dedicated to his personal experience... not even flying, but living: the childhood memories, his sense of time, place, purpose of life and so on. As other reviewers have noticed, there is very little about technical aspects of flying, although some random bits are unexpectedly well covered in great detail, comparable even to textbooks: for example he goes into explaining indicated vs actual airspeed. I actually managed to read all of it, but not because I was enjoying the endless self-reflection of the author, but because I was looking for a specific answer to the obvious question of how did he manage to become a major airline pilot so quickly and so late in life? There are myriads of private pilots with multiple ratings racking up their CFL hours in hopes of joining a regional airline some day, but in his case it was more like "I decided to become a pilot at 26 and here I am flying a jet on international routes 4 years later". Perhaps the job market for pilots was better in the UK in 2004?

This is an unusual book that might appeal to a wide range of readers: Those interested in aircraft, airliner passengers, and those who enjoy good writing irrespective of the subject. The author is a US-born pilot who, after starting his career as a business consultant, took commercial pilot training in the UK and now flies 747s for British Airways as a First Officer. The book ranges widely over the author's experiences as a pilot and as a passenger. The technical aspects of pre-flight, flight, and the duties of the pilot are described but are not the focus of the story. Instead, the author muses on his reactions to the strange life of a pilot in which one crosses immense stretches of the globe in less than a day, crossing time-zones, weather patterns, deserts, and mountain ranges with often only a brief contact with the destination before returning to the point of departure. Strange, too, that a pilot rarely flies with the same crew again. Instead, this small group of professionals, in the cockpit and in the cabin, coalesce in the preflight briefing, perform as a unit for the duration of the flight, and then disband, maybe never to reunite again. Mr. Vanhoenacker brings a literary background and a poet's sensibility to his writing. But, perhaps, the most remarkable aspects of the book are his powers of observation coupled with an introspection that vividly conveys how he is affected by what he sees. We share his delight at the changing light, at multiple sunrises and sunsets on the same journey, at the moon on the ocean nearly 40,000 feet below, and at an aircraft, coming to meet its shadow as it lands.

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